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NEWS RELEASE

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CUSTER COUNTY BENEFITS FROM \$2.8 MILLION DOLLAR INVESTMENT FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & WELFARE

Last year, Custer County residents and businesses received \$2.8 million from Department of Health & Welfare programs that help people in need. The investment benefits every one of the county's 4,100 residents. Of Idaho's 44 counties, Custer County ranks number 29 in per capita outlay of Health & Welfare dollars.

The investment of state and federal tax dollars amounts to \$684 for every man, woman and child residing in Custer County. This includes citizens who may not receive a single direct service from the Department. The statewide average is \$839 per capita.

The Department distributed \$1.15 billion in Idaho communities in 2004. These funds came from Medicaid, additional payments to hospitals, Food Stamps, the Idaho Child Care Program, the Women, Infants and Children nutritional program, foster care and a variety of other assistance programs.

"This is an investment for all Custer County residents," says Health & Welfare Director Karl Kurtz. "These are tax dollars put to good use because they are used to help people become healthy and productive and less reliant on government assistance. This money goes to foster care for children in crisis, substance abuse treatment, child care so parents can work to support their family, and dozens of other badly needed services."

"This is as much about sustaining communities as it is investing," adds Kurtz. "By providing programs that support people, we are helping communities and their residents build the endurance and strength they need to remain vital. Everyone profits from this investment, not just those who use Department programs. This isn't just me pounding my chest. That's what community leaders tell us."

Custer County Commission Chairman Lin Hintze says, “Department programs are very important. The programs are critical to the county. We used to have a lot more here, but now we’re a retirement community. The Medicaid money is pretty important.”

Last year, the Department’s Medicaid Division spent nearly \$2.6 million on health care for residents of the county.

Custer County residents also received \$99,000 in Food Stamps to help feed their families, spending \$76,200 with local grocers, including \$25,200 at Village Square on Highway 93 in Challis. Manager Jon Miller says, “In this economy, every dollar is important, no matter where it comes from.”

The store has 43 employees, and the money helps maintain staff. “Everything impacts the bottom line. We fight for every dollar that comes in the door,” Miller says, not only because of the economy, the dwindling population (Challis has fewer than 900 residents), and locals who like to get out of Dodge and shop in Idaho Falls — but because of the competition across the street. Lamb’s Food redeemed \$29,900 in Food Stamps in 2004.

Department spending helps people, and it has an upside for business, according to Idaho economist John Church. “This is not lost money. The spending is an investment. It goes back into the economy. If an employer came to town and spent this much money we would be elated. People need to remember that a big chunk of this is federal money which is a huge return on our taxes. This comes back and helps stimulate the economy and it helps people.”

Kurtz says, “Not only is the Department money a human investment, but it creates jobs and maintains healthy businesses. These dollars recycle numerous times in each community and help us keep the high quality of life we enjoy in Idaho. This is a wise use of taxpayer dollars because the money spent in the community often stays in the community. The dollars are spent again and again to help create jobs and an infrastructure that provides healthy and safe neighborhoods.”

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(**Editors:** Interviews are available on request. Contact Ross Mason at 334-0693 or Regional Director Tracey Sessions at 528-5791 for more information.)

**More information on Health & Welfare’s
investment in every Idaho County
can be found online at
<http://www.healthandwelfare.idaho.gov>**